

Transnationalism, Ireland and *The Bell*

The relationship between the transnational writer, the national canon, and a 'world literature' has particular implications for the study of Irish literature in the twentieth century. There are many good reasons to think more transnationally about Irish literature. Where Irish historians, and Irish language scholars have begun to do so in earnest, it is arguable that the study of Irish literature lags behind in this respect.¹ The nation-state remains the principal lens through which we study Irish literature.² The seminal text in this respect has been Seamus Deane's three volume *Field Day Anthology of Irish Writing*, published at a time when the concept of the nation-state had already been drawn into question.³ Such was the centrality of national identity in defining the scope of Deane's work that other important social classifications, most notably gender, were omitted from the first three volumes and would have to be rectified in two subsequent editions.⁴ Although Deane's work did much to reclaim what could be considered Irish writing, using nationality as a marker is not without its pitfalls. If recent scholarship has helped to reclaim Irishness as central to Samuel Beckett's writing from internationalist and modernist readings, other critics have been quick to point out the difficulty in pigeon-holing

¹ For examples of such work see, A., McCarthy (ed.), *Ireland in the world: Comparative, transnational, and personal perspectives* (New York: Routledge, 2015); Enda, Delaney 'Our Island Story? Towards a Transnational History of Late Modern Ireland', *Irish Historical Studies*, 37, (2011), 599-621; Ciaran O'Neill, *Catholics of Consequence: Transnational Education, Social Mobility, and the Irish Catholic Elite 1850-1900* (Oxford, 2014). For an essay on transnational approaches to the Irish language see Máirín Nic Eoin, 'Interdisciplinary Perspectives on Transnational Irish-Language Writing', *Breac* (12 April, 2013).

² There are notable exceptions. See Amanda Tucker and Moira Casey (eds), *Where Motley is Worn: Transnational Irish Literatures* (Cork, 2014)

³ Seamus Deane (ed.), *The Field Day Anthology of Irish Writing*, vol. 1, 2 & 3 (Derry: Field Day Publications, 1991). See Benedict Anderson, *Imagined Communities: Reflections on the Origins and Spread of Nationalism* (London: Verso, 1983).

⁴ Angela Bourke (ed.), *The Field Day Anthology of Irish Writing: Irish Women's Writing and Traditions*, vol. 4 & 5 (New York: New York University Press, 2002). These omissions caused considerable debate at the time, see Lucy McDiarmuid, 'Isn't it a great pity?', *The Times Literary Supplement* (27 December 2002), p. 22; Roisin Higgins, 'A Drift of Chosen Females', *The Irish University Review*, vol. 33, no. 2 (Autumn-Winter 2003), pp.400-406.

authors within any restrictive categorical definitions.⁵ The transnational could expose a fruitful seam for Irish literary studies to explore, and there are several examples of scholars choosing to approach the work of first and second generation Irish writers in a more globalized, transatlantic, or archipelagic context.⁶ By prioritising the flow of ideas, attitudes and cultures, over and above those of individuals or of power relationships, transnational literary studies can help to show how artistic production itself is ‘constructed in the movement between places, sites, and regions’.⁷ Such a methodology within literary studies need not eschew traditional methods of analysis, nor deny the importance of national, gender, or identity politics within a writer’s work. Rather it is a question of emphasis, a focus on looking at the liminal, the gaps and the transitions within literature to paint a broader picture of the way that writers and artists have engaged with the world of their time. Seen in this light then, Ireland is not just an island on the periphery of Europe and outside the metropolises of London or Paris. Ireland becomes the centre of exchange and as the site at the core of a nexus of ideas and texts; one of many nodes in a transnational interchange of artistic expression.

Perhaps one of the most obvious ways in which the transnational in Irish literature can be examined is through the burgeoning area of periodical studies. The study of Irish literary periodicals has developed considerably in the previous two decades, and periodical culture itself has become a subject for serious academic debate.⁸ Literary periodicals, or little magazines can be, by their very definition, transnational in composition and identity. Such publications are often ‘worldly’ in their outlook, co-created by writers from across the globe, and engaged in debates around art and culture that traverse national boundaries: they offer the ideal format for the study of the transnational within Irish literature. The literary magazine has seen a rise in scholarly interest in both Great Britain and in

⁵ See Sean Kennedy, (ed.), *Beckett and Ireland* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2010). Edna Longley has shown the problem of trying to easily categorise W.B. Yeats as a modernist or as a nationalist. See Edna Longley, *Yeats and Modern Poetry* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2013).

⁶ See Michael Griffin, *Enlightenment in Ruins: The Geographies of Oliver Goldsmith* (Lewisburg, PA, 2013); John McCourt, *Writing the Frontier: Anthony Trollope between Britain and Ireland* (Oxford, 2015).

⁷ Isabel Hofmeyer, ‘AHR Conversation: On Transnational History’, *The American Historical Review*, vol. 11, no. 5 (2006), p. 1442.

⁸ The foundational text in this area for Ireland is Frank Shovlin’s *The Irish Literary Periodical 1923 – 1958* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2004).

America that has culminated in some substantial contributions to transnational literary studies.⁹ However, Ireland's role within these debates has been less successfully explored. This essay will discuss the Irish literary magazine, *The Bell* (1940-1954), to trace the transnational element within Irish letters, and to show the current of ideas, writers, and debates that flowed across borders within this publication. In doing so it will focus on the work of its first editor Seán O'Faoláin, who set the tone of the magazine as aspiring to the highest global standards, and gave it, in Peadar O'Donnell's memorable phrase, its 'recognisable gait of going'.¹⁰ That magazines such as Cyril Connolly's *Horizon* (1940-1949) would rely on Irish authors such as Louis MacNeice, or that Seán O'Faoláin's first successful venture in fiction would be published in R. P. Blackmuir's Harvard journal *The Hound and Horn* (1927-1934) is sometimes acknowledged, but mainly from critics working within Irish literature.¹¹ Less weight is given in the critical scholarship to the role of the contributors and their place within the journals, rather tending to see these magazines as products of national identity or of tensions within the metropolis in which they were published.¹² In O'Faoláin's case, his choice to remain in Ireland and reject the exile so famously embodied in Joyce, would not prevent him from publishing his work across a global network of periodicals such as, *Lovat Dickson's Magazine*, *The Virginia Quarterly Review*, *Atlantic Monthly*, *London Review of Books*, *Saturday Evening Post*, *London Mercury*, *Holiday*, *Yale*

⁹ The key text in Great Britain is Brooker and Thacker's *The Oxford Critical and Cultural History of Modernist Magazines* which looks at magazines from 1880 to 1955 in Britain and Ireland, a period that covers the formation of two new nations in the Republic of Ireland and Northern Ireland. In America *The Modernist Journals Project*, run jointly between Brown University and the University of Tulsa, is a digitization project whose remit covers any English language literary magazine published between 1890-1922. See Peter Brooker and Andrew Thacker (eds.), *The Oxford Critical and Cultural History of Modernist Magazines: Volume 1, Britain and Ireland 1880-1955* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2009); *The Modernist Journals Project*: <http://modjournal.org/>.

¹⁰ Peadar O'Donnell, 'The Little Magazine', *Irish Times* (4 March 1970), p. 11.

¹¹ See Louis MacNeice, 'Dublin', *Horizon: A Review of Literature and Art*, vol. 1, no. 6 (February 1940); Seán O'Faoláin, 'Fugue', *The Hound and Horn*, no. 2 (January-March 1929).

¹² Brooker and Thacker's volume, for example, replicates these structural divides by having a chapter titled 'Beyond the Metropolis' devoted to Welsh, Irish, and Scottish magazines, with Gordon Craig's *The Mask* (published in Florence) and Laura Riding's (an American) *Epilogue* included. There have been some recent attempts to complicate this picture, by questioning the very notion of cosmopolitanism itself, see Nels Pearson, *Irish Cosmopolitanism: Location and Dislocation in James Joyce, Elizabeth Bowen and Samuel Beckett* (Florida: University Press of Florida, 2015).

Review, *The New York Times Magazine*, *Life* and even some substantial contributions to *Playboy*.¹³ This reductive analysis is an obvious side-effect when dealing with national literature and, more commonly, can be a direct result of editorial difficulties around categorisation. The appropriation of writers and artists from outside of London as British once they arrive in the metropolis is a common trope within criticism, as if the legacy of those at the cutting edge of avant-garde artistic production is tainted by acknowledging their roots from outside of the centre. The debates around T. S. Eliot's or W.H. Auden's inclusion in anthologies of 'British' or 'American' poetry respectively speak volumes about the desire to include these artists within a single unbroken tradition.¹⁴

A transnational approach facilitates a narrative around the growth of English poetry and letters without restrictively defining it as an exclusively national tradition. T. S. Eliot's contribution to the development of English poetry is profound, and he dominated the London-based poetry scene as a director at Faber and Faber, yet the issue of his nationality is not entirely central to this contribution, although it is important in understanding his poetic development. Similarly, although in an earlier generation, Irish writers such as William Allingham made their way to London to take up influential positions within the literary world of the city, and a transnational approach to his work would allow an understanding of how the lower middle-class son of a bank manager from Ballyshannon in county Donegal could become central to the promotion of a movement such as the Pre-Raphaelite Brotherhood. Allingham, for example, was editor of the influential *Fraser's Magazine* (1830-1882) and this facilitated his close relationship with Alfred Lord Tennyson; his book *The Music Master* contained woodcuts by two giants of Pre-Raphaelite art in D. G. Rossetti and John E. Millais.¹⁵ Seen from this perspective then, the history of Irish letters is also the history of English letters and the development

¹³ For a comprehensive, although not exhaustive, list of O'Faoláin's journal publications see Marie Arndt, *A Critical Study of Sean O'Faolain's Life and Works* (Lewiston, New York: Edward Mellon Press, 2001).

¹⁴ For example, see John Wain (ed), *The Oxford Anthology of English Poetry: Volume II, Blake to Heaney* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1990), a volume that includes T. S. Eliot as well as many Irish poets; Rita Dove (ed), *The Penguin Anthology of American Poetry* (New York: Penguin Books, 2011), which includes W. H. Auden.

¹⁵ Allingham is perhaps most famous now for his diary. See Geoffrey Grigson (ed), *William Allingham's Diary* (Fontwell: Centaur Press, 1969).

of one, was linked to the development of the other. Nowhere was this more evident than in the literary periodicals of second half of the twentieth century.

In October of 1940 *The Bell* was launched. Edited by Seán O’Faoláin it would go on to become one of the most influential literary journals in Ireland over the next fourteen years of its publication.¹⁶ *The Bell* would contain some of the most important literary figures in post-independence Ireland, publishing the likes of Seán O’Faoláin, Peadar O’Donnell, Frank O’Connor, Patrick Kavanagh, Hubert Butler, Conor Cruise O’Brien, and Anthony Cronin as well as many others. But it also included several writers from outside of Ireland and promoted itself as a global journal of letters. It published works from a diverse source of established international figures, such as the novelist and biographer Neville Braybrooke, the composer Sir Arnold Bax, the Indian anti-imperialist and activist Ayana Deva Angadi, the travel writer Nigel Heseltine, the Chinese educationalist and author Yeh Sheng-Tao, the American shorts story writer William Saroyan, the physicist Erwin Schrodinger and the philosopher Jean Paul Sartre amongst others. It bravely made space for Northern Irish writer such as Sam Hannah Bell, Thomas Carnduff, W.R. Rodgers, John Hewitt and Robert Greacen during the difficult period of Éire’s wartime neutrality and it also published several high-profile authors with transnational reputations and careers in its attempt to develop Irish critical standards and tastes. *The Bell* remained a vital lifeline for Irish culture during the isolation of the Emergency and offered a window into artistic developments in other countries. *The Bell* was noticeable, although far from unique, in its attempts to promote cross-border exchanges.¹⁷ One of its most important contributions to Irish letters was the publication of three special Ulster numbers in July 1941 and July-August of 1942. At the time of their publication Partition had only been in place for twenty one years and the opening up of space for dissenting Northern Irish voices within a southern literary journal was a radical move in the context of the

¹⁶ For more on *The Bell* see Niall Carson, *Rebel by vocation: Séan O’Faoláin and the generation of The Bell* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2016); Kelly Matthews, *The Bell Magazine and the Representation of Irish Identity* (Dublin: Four Courts Press, 2012)

¹⁷ For example, Irish Catholic magazines such as *The Capuchin Annual* were transnational by definition of their focus on Rome. For more on *The Capuchin Annual* and an overview of periodical culture in twentieth century Ireland see Mark O’Brien and Felix M. Larkin (eds.), *Periodicals and Journalism in Twentieth-Century Ireland* (Dublin: Four Courts Press, 2014).

political atmosphere of the time. These Ulster numbers were interesting because of their contributors' articulation of difference from that of their southern counterparts, and it is illuminating to trace the lineaments of the debates that were held within. Partition created the environment in which it was possible to see the transnational posturing of the two new nation-states as they engaged in a process of mythic nation building that was captured in the course of cultural production. That *The Bell* was launched in 1940 at the beginning of the Second World War allowed it to capture some of the identity crises that Éire and Northern Ireland would undergo. The war quickly threw the two fledgling states into emergency and began a process of calcification of the polarised identities on the island between belligerent Protestant North and neutral Catholic South. Literary exchanges between Northern Ireland and Éire are not transnational in the strictest sense at all, but what *The Bell* uniquely captures is two nation states in the process of articulating difference, and the many instances where these distinctions fail to live up to the lived reality of shared experience on the island as a whole. Debates erupted across the borders about legitimacy and inheritance in a magazine that provided the space for those from opposing political backgrounds to engage with each other.

In the summer of 1941 the first Special Ulster Number of *The Bell* was published, and in its editorial, called simply 'Ulster', Seán O'Faoláin described what he hoped to achieve with its arrival. 'Ulster' clearly outlines the difficulties that Partition raised. As O'Faoláin saw it, what the Irish as a people were losing was not a matter of national sovereignty against a competing opponent, rather an opportunity to embrace and secure a progressive, modern society for their collective futures.¹⁸ Although O'Faoláin was no fan of political partition, he felt the real harm attendant upon division would be one of the creation of a false dichotomy between North and South, an intense and bitter opposition between two complementary peoples:

This problem is not primarily the problem of Partition. On the contrary the ghost that it has inevitably raised is the whole question of the future of small cultural entities in a world where borders fall every day [...] Applied, it calls not for the destruction of a political Border so much

¹⁸ For a comprehensive analysis of the cultural value of Northern Ireland during the Second World War see Guy Woodward, *Culture, Northern Ireland and the Second World War* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2015).

as for a mental Barrier, that both North and South may be saved from the results of an unnatural rivalry.¹⁹

What seemed to disturb O'Faoláin here was the cultural rift that Partition had caused, rather than any matter of concern for the peoples displaced by its creation. O'Faoláin believed in the creation of a new national identity for the whole of Ireland, and hoped artistic exchange could facilitate its development. Perhaps the best illustration of this comes in his history *The Irish* (1947) where he claimed: '[t]his book is not a history of political events [...] It is, in effect, a creative history of the growth of a racial mind.'²⁰ One of the great tragedies of Partition for O'Faoláin was that although both the North and South of Ireland were aesthetically productive in their own right, they were unable to produce, artistically, anything near as bountiful as a unified country did during the years of the Revival: 'it cannot be said that either is being at all fruitful as that undivided Ireland of, say, forty years ago.' He went on to list some of the great examples of authors or characters who were productive at that time: Yeats, AE, Joyce, Lady Gregory, Daniel Corkery, Gogarty, Pearse, Thomas MacDonagh, Joseph Plunkett, Arthur Griffith, '[i]t was also a period when not one of these writers would deny that he was indebted to the literatures of the world. They were national. They were not nationalistic. The difference is in the arrival of the Ism.'²¹ Although O'Faoláin is convincing in his argument that the amount of literary talent that a united, if British ruled, Ireland of forty years earlier had produced was substantial, one is less convinced by his suggestion that writers such as Corkery, Pearse or Griffith would have been any less nationalistic, with or without the Ism. With this assertion O'Faoláin tried to create a false distinction between 'national' and 'nationalism' without ever clearly defining his terms. He was struggling to fit a diverse and complex set of writers into an idealised aesthetic outlook, as if they all, through the process of their writing, could separate their artistic lives from their political or contextual viewpoints. Although O'Faoláin was keen to stress individual Ulster writers' unique personalities, he still saw fit to link them through a nebulous artistic kinship, in effect, a cross-border anti-partitionist aesthetic. All of

¹⁹ Seán O'Faoláin, 'Ulster', *The Bell*, vol. 2, no. 4 (July 1941), p. 4.

²⁰ Seán O'Faoláin, *The Irish* (Middlesex: Pelican Books, 1947), p. 9.

²¹ Seán O'Faoláin, 'Ulster', *The Bell*, vol. 2, no. 4 (July 1941), pp. 5, 5.

this would seem to indicate that O'Faoláin was keen to stress the unity behind Irish cultural life, even at the cost of ignoring its differences, irrespective of how large or pressing those differences might have been.

O'Faoláin's drive for artistic exchange between the peoples divided through Partition led him to a reductive analysis of the cultural heritage and identity of the two communities. As such, he tended to over-play his hand with regard to both an analysis of the character of the people of the North and their Southern compatriots, and to their respective aesthetic traits. This led him down the blind alley of simplistic binary opposition: 'of this island, the southern portion has been for a long time intent on self-sufficiency, while the little corner clipped off the north has been linked politically to a vast empire and through it, to every distant corner of the world.' To O'Faoláin's credit, here he was aware of the growing dangers that political Partition brought, and he was keen to avoid any further social distance between the two communities increasing. However, he fell into the trap of categorizing the societies in direct opposition to each other, between an industrialised, outward-looking, modern north and a rural, navel-gazing, retrogressive south. In doing this O'Faoláin only reinforced a stereotypical conception of these two disparate identities and thus undermined his own argument for a strong cultural unity and a holistic exchange of ideas. This understanding of a deepening political divide, and a fear of its consequences, manifests itself in O'Faoláin's writing in *The Bell* by an insistent berating of his own community in the South. He believed the Southern Irish had been ignoring from a moral high-ground a political state they felt was thrust upon them by a perfidious Britain: 'our people are, it would seem, self-absorbed to an amazing degree – so self-absorbed as to cut out [...] all detachment, critical sense, a sense of proportion, a sensible objectivity, even a sense of humour.' On the other hand, this fear of a growing political and cultural divide can also lead in his work to bland generalisations about the North and to an idealisation of its inhabitants by way of appealing to tired stereotypes about their identity. This appeal has the effect of avoiding the harsh realities of the difficulties and sectarian differences that were being experienced: 'one feels that these people of the North are much more detached, and extroverted, have a nice sense of humour, do more thinking, and live a more varied

life.’ All this is not to say that O’Faoláin was not a shrewd observer of Irish life, both political and aesthetic.

However, it does reveal that he was struggling to address the issues himself, and how the southern Irish intellectual elite struggled to reconcile the realities of Partition with the links and relationships they had established in Northern Ireland. If all of this perhaps seems unkind to O’Faoláin and to what he was attempting in his focus on the North in the pages of *The Bell*, what redeems him is his humane sympathy with the difficulties of Irish life when considered as a whole. He saw the bitterness and sectarianism as the result of a hijacking of common consensus on both sides. This is where O’Faoláin excelled and his bravery in bringing such a contentious issue into the realm of the public sphere must be commended:

One wishes, therefore, that this Ulster issue could be merely a little part of a constant interchange of ideas between our people – between the common people on both sides; not for political or commercial reasons but for those purely human reasons which are so much more likely to create a real and fruitful affiliation.²²

Although O’Faoláin was pushing his own aesthetic agenda, he was alive to the suffering and hardship that sectarianism brought, and was suspicious of its embodiment in Partition. The inclusion of a special Ulster issue was a bold and positive step on behalf of O’Faoláin in the political climate of Éire at that time. O’Faoláin had worked hard to get contributors from Northern Ireland to write for *The Bell* and had approached the poet and broadcaster W.R. Rodgers in March of 1941, who was working for the British Broadcasting Corporation (BBC), for a contribution for this special Ulster number, ‘We are trying to get out a special number for July (“12th”. No.) and would like you to send by return some items you would think suitable’.²³ Rodgers’ role at the BBC was one of the many routes that Irish authors of *The Bell* could take towards publishing for the radio and a larger British market; he was a

²² O’Faoláin, ‘Ulster’, pp. 4, 7, 7, 10.

²³ Séan O’Faoláin to W.R. Rodgers (March 1941), W.R. Rodgers Papers, Public records Office Northern Ireland (PRONI), D2833/C/1/21/1.

producer there, along with the playwright Denis Johnston and the poet Louis MacNeice.²⁴ O'Faoláin had published Rodgers's poem 'Ceilidhe' in February and was looking to publish him again in April, but in the end he decided to hold back publication until July to support the poetry section for his special number:

I would like to print BEAGLES in our April issue with another poem of yours. Can you send us the proofs or something of the Secker book and mark those already published? You will note that we printed your CEILIDHE in February, and in such haste that we had no time to write you. For BEAGLES and another poem we would pay £3.3.0. Still in haste, Seán O'Faoláin.²⁵

At this stage O'Faoláin was still on formal terms with Rodgers but he saw enough promise in his poetry to want to include it as an example of the best Northern Ireland had to offer. Rodgers's work is a typical example of the type of identity politics that played out implicitly and often explicitly within the pages of *The Bell*.

Northern Irish writers such as W.R. Rodgers and John Hewitt played an important role in *The Bell*, and their presence was not unusual in the artistic scenes in Éire. But Belfast was not the only city whose literary influence could be felt in Dublin. Ireland's unique position during World War Two, with Éire's neutrality and Northern Ireland's belligerence, yet with free travel between Great Britain and the whole of Ireland, led to some important cultural crossovers between Dublin, Belfast and London.²⁶ Indeed, the very existence of *The Bell* itself is down to the enlightened thinking of the press attaché at the office of the United Kingdom's Representative to Éire, John Betjeman, who secured its paper allowance. The importance of Betjeman to Ireland's cultural development has not been explored in comprehensive detail, but he is perhaps the single most important English figure in wartime Ireland for literary relations between the two countries. Betjeman, although he found Irish hostility to Britain difficult to accept at first, did have the good sense to see that cultural exchange was the best remedy

²⁴ For more on Denis Johnston see Bernard Adams, *Denis Johnston: A Life* (Dublin: Lilliput, 2002); for insight into Rodgers's and Louis MacNeice's role in promoting *The Bell* authors see Tom Walker, *Louis MacNeice and the Irish Poetry of his Time* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2015), pp. 114-125.

²⁵ Séan O'Faoláin to W.R. Rodgers (4 March 1941), W.R. Rodgers Papers, PRONI, D2833/C/1/21/2.

²⁶ For example, Éire's avant-garde painting scene was reinvigorated by the arrival of The White Stage Group of conscientious-objector, émigré painters, see Fiona Barber, *Art in Ireland Since 1910* (London: Reaktion Books, 2013), pp. 85-107.

to hardening political positions. When he first arrived in Dublin he wrote to the editor of the London based magazine *New Writing*, John Lehmann to ask him if he wanted any Irish writers for his journal:

I enclose a copy of *The Bell* in which there may be stories or articles to interest you for *New Writing*. If there are, I should write direct to Sean O'Faoláin, the Editor. There is no need to mention that I put you on to the idea or I will be accused of doing propaganda and I do not think that the accusation would be justified . . . They are all very fearful of British propaganda here. I don't blame them.²⁷

Betjeman's belief in the intrinsic value of such exchanges was later validated as Lehmann would go on to edit *Penguin New Writing* series that featured many Irish writers.²⁸ Betjeman's achievements in Ireland were partially down to his easy charm and his success in winning over many of the important writers within *The Bell*. Although he was to have a particularly close relationship with its second poetry editor Geoffrey Taylor, with whom he would go on to co-edit the collection *English Love Poems* (1957), Betjeman was a keen supporter of many of its contributors. When Cecil Day Lewis was in Dublin to give a public lecture in his role as the Poet Laureate, Betjeman was working in the background making introductions; he wrote to *The Bell's* first poetry editor Frank O'Connor:

Loike the bloody fuil Oi ham Oi did not luik in the *Oirish Toimes* yasterdee for to see that yez was churmun fo' the Day Lewis lecture and so when Oi met Day Lewis on the hairplane, Oi did not think ter be takin' him along to see yez before the meeting. In fact it was not until owld *Pádraig Cábhanagh* [Patrick Kavanagh] was after a-telephoning to me, that Oi realised the omission Oi had made. *Verzeihen sie mir, mein lieber freund* [Pardon me, my dear friend]. British diplomacy has made another blunder. But Oi got into touch with him last noight and he said he was going for to see yez *inniu* [today]. I even was after talking about yez ter Day Lewis and he was hadmiring of your writing and Oi was after saying yez was sure to be after seeing him at the lecture.²⁹

Betjeman's gentle mocking of the Irish accent speaks of his ease with, and closeness to, O'Connor. But it also reveals the difficult role he had in promoting understanding between the two countries. These artistic exchanges and introductions were of lasting value, although they must have been difficult to

²⁷ John Betjeman to John Lehmann (12 February 1941), quoted in Stephen Games (ed), *Tennis Whites and Teacakes* (London: John Murray, 2007), p. 311.

²⁸ As well as regularly publishing the more established authors of Cecil Day-Lewis, and Louis MacNeice, Lehman would even publish contributions from Irish authors like the socialist, republican and tramp Jim Phelan. See Jim Phelan, 'The [Slip](#)', *The Penguin New Writing*, vol. 4 (Harmsworth: Penguin, 1941).

²⁹ John Betjeman to Frank O'Connor [Michael O'Donovan] (16 September 1941), in Candidia Lycett Green (ed), *John Betjeman: Letters Volume One 1926 to 1951* (London: Minerva, 1995), p.297.

argue for their continued support from the British Ministry of Supply during wartime engagement.³⁰

The Bell relied on Betjeman to open doors for them with the writers and editors of wartime London, but they also could rely upon their own connections to push their agenda outside of Ireland.

The Bell was the most important literary journal in wartime Ireland, and O'Faoláin, a graduate of Harvard, had an established transnational literary reputation before he became its editor. It was vital to promoting Irish writers and critics and to exposing its readers to external influences in a high calibre of writing, despite it undergoing wartime censorship.³¹ However, perhaps the single most influential edition produced by its writers was not an actual edition of *The Bell* at all. In January of 1942 Cyril Connolly, the London based editor and writer, released the 'Irish Number' of *Horizon*.³² Although it is almost impossible to trace the significance of an individual magazine, this 'Irish Number' of *Horizon* stands out for the import of its contents. This volume contained the first publication of what would later become 'The Great Hunger' by Patrick Kavanagh; Frank O'Connor's passionate attack on Irish literature and culture, 'The Future of Irish Literature'; Seán O'Faoláin's account of the influence of W.B. Yeats on Irish writing, and Kenneth Clark's praise of Jack Yeats's paintings. The style and contents of the volume would suggest that O'Faoláin was guiding Connolly in his editorial selections, not only because many of these writers also wrote for *The Bell* but also in its oppositional format, with two conflicting articles placed side by side.³³ The edition contained 'Eire and the World Crisis' by M. J. MacManus and 'Another View' by T. L. Murray. MacManus was the hagiographer of Eamon de Valera and leader writer for the *Irish Press* and T. L. Murray was a publicist, they both wrote opposing views

³⁰ Bryce Evans has written on the frosty trade relationship between the two countries and the difficulties in securing essentials such as paper rations. See Bryce Evans, *Farewell to Plato's Cave: Ireland During the Second World War* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2014).

³¹ *The Bell* was obliged to submit copy to the Office of the Censor before publication. Considering the range of material that it did publish, this would seem to have been to ensure there was no British or German propaganda, nor any discussion of the war. For more on *The Bell*'s campaign against censorship see Kelly Matthews, *The Bell Magazine and the Representation of Irish Identity* (Dublin: Four Courts, 2012), pp. 142-144.

³² Cyril Connolly (ed), *Horizon: A Review of Literature and Art*, vol 5, no. 25 (March 1942).

³³ O'Faoláin had known Connolly from at least before the war, where they had met in Germany whilst O'Faoláin was travelling with his lover Elizabeth Bowen. However, he is likely to have met him even earlier through shared literary circles in London; see Niall Carson, *Rebel by vocation Seán O'Faoláin and the generation of The Bell* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2016), p. 41.

of Ireland during the war and of the value of its society. MacManus in 'Eire and the World Crisis' found an Ireland being calmly led by de Valera to its rightful place as a neutral country in a belligerent Europe. MacManus's vision of Irish life is one of indifferent neutrality that belied the anti-English sentiment so keenly felt by John Betjeman:

The people of Eire have little faith in British democracy; they prefer the Irish to the English way of living; they cannot, by any stretch of the imagination, bring themselves to regard Britain as the sole champion of inter-national good sportsmanship or as the saviour of small nations; and, so far from regarding the present European struggle as a holy crusade by Britain and her Allies against the powers of Darkness, they suspect it is nothing more than a clash between two imperialisms.

Connolly's bravery in publishing such a seemingly indifferent view to British wartime struggles in London, matches O'Faoláin's in publishing those from Northern Ireland in Dublin, especially when MacManus claimed that de Valera had already foreseen such a travesty as the war develop, 'Somebody with a long memory may even recall how de Valera, when President of the league, warned the Assembly in an historic speech that all that has happened would happen if it did not put its house in order'.³⁴ This article was published just six months after the Allied evacuation at Dunkirk and with many dead and many more preparing for further battle, such crowing would have rankled.

Connolly's own editorial, written upon return from a trip to Ireland with John Betjeman as guide, had the good grace to see de Valera as a man who was widely read, philosophical, religious and European, finishes with a question, wondering at the value of Éire's own peace: 'Are the wisest people in the world those who have kept their calendar at 1938? Has everyone else gone mad? Who are right, those who cling obstinately to peace, their hard-won convalescence, or we who feel that, until we know what we are prepared to die for, we are not fully alive'.³⁵ The use of the inclusive 'we' in Connolly's final assessment betrays his own answer here, and it is a moot point whether any of the veterans of the war of independence who made up the bulk of *Fianna Fáil's* political hierarchy were unaware of what they were prepared to die for, but nevertheless, MacManus's position was

³⁴ M.J. MacManus, 'Eire and the World Crisis', *Horizon*, vol. 5, no. 25 (January 1942), p.18, 20.

³⁵ Cyril Connolly, 'Comment', *Horizon*, vol 5., no. 25 (January 1942), p. 11

provocative. To counterbalance this, Connolly also published T. L. Murray's reading of the Irish political scene and one that was much more jaundiced. For Murray, Éire had become politically ossified since de Valera's ascent to power, and the early promise of his victory brought no tangible results. What was worse was that a politics of attainment had been replaced by a politics of personality, and as such, issues such as Partition remained insoluble:

The truth of the matter is that the real sufferers from the boarder are within, not outside, it. In these circumstances it is not surprising that politics in Ireland for the first time in history are practically non-existent: what life there is now arises from the personality of Mr. de Valera. An election now would only test his present popularity. There is nothing else to decide.³⁶

Such pessimism was undoubtedly part of the political atmosphere in Ireland, especially for those who had followed W.T. Cosgrave and Fine Gael, but for Murray, Éire was in danger of a dramatic swing to the right if threatened by the war, and 'in an emergency a Fascist State could be brought into being'. Murray was willing to concede that fears of a Fascist state might have been overstated, but if a violent change in politics was not enacted then the alternative was the long road to nowhere; for Murray, de Valera's Ireland was and Ireland of isolation and stagnation:

Neutrality may create a desire for action for action's sake, and the possibilities I have mentioned may be but symptoms of that desire. Should that be so, Ireland, as a non-playing member of the Commonwealth, untroubled from without, peaceful within, her eyes fixed on the dim and slowly receding image of the Republic, to establish which so many were killed, so much that was beautiful was burnt and laid waste, may remain as she is for ever.³⁷

Seán O'Faoláin's and *The Bell's* influence is clear in this volume, especially in the replication of the oppositional format that he so successfully exploited in the Ulster numbers of *The Bell*, placing an overtly Nationalist article next to an overtly Unionist one. More importantly, this edition of *Horizon* allowed O'Faoláin to place a discussion about the war in a much more open forum than he would have been allowed in Dublin. Undoubtedly many copies of this edition made their way across the Irish Sea, and would have been discussed from the staff rooms of National Schools to the literary scene in the Pearl Bar. The regular contributor to *The Bell* and author Francis MacManus captured the value of this

³⁶ T.L. Murray, 'Another View', *Horizon*, vol. 5, no. 25 (January 1941), p. 23.

³⁷ T.L. Murray, 'Another View', *Horizon*, vol. 5, no. 25 (January 1941), p. 26, 26.

edition, but failed to see its significance, when he reviewed it for the *Irish Examiner*. He felt that the political articles of T.L. Murray and M.J. MacManus were fair comment, and that Cyril Connolly's own opinion piece was balanced, but as a representation of the best of Irish writing a lot had been left to be desired:

It is true that between them M. J. MacManus and T. L. Murray give two sides of Ireland's internal and inter-national political problems, and that Sean O'Faolain contributes a literary detail to the picture by discussing Yeats and the younger generation. But after that there is grotesquerie [sic]. There is a lengthy extract from a virile unpublished poem by Patrick Kavanagh about a bachelor, clay-clogged, mother-ridden farmer, and a short story by Edward Sheehy about a solicitor in an emotional and spiritual mess; but in these two things there is no breadth. Nor is there breadth, nor weight, nor depth in Frank O'Connor's tirade about the future of Irish literature, about which future many readers will be less alarmed than about the author's own.³⁸

There is an irony here that Patrick Kavanagh's epic masterpiece 'The Great Hunger' would be first published outside of Ireland and outside of *The Bell*. For many years the magazine was his main outlet for publication, although O'Faoláin was a poor judge of his poetry (Kavanagh's reputation was salvaged from obscurity with the publication of his *Collected Poems* by the London firm MacGibbon and Kee in 1964).³⁹ Where Frank MacManus was more justified in his criticism was of Frank O'Connor's 'The Future of Irish Literature'. Since the foundation of the Irish Academy of Letters by W.B. Yeats in September of 1932 and its celebrated defence of George Bernard Shaw's *The Adventures of the Black Girl in Her Search for God* (1932), Irish censorship had been perceived in London as excessive in the extreme. As early as 1937, in a book devoted to the excesses of censorship in England, one author was to find that, 'it is only necessary to cross the Irish Channel to find a suppression of literature far worse than that obtaining here'.⁴⁰ The veracity of that claim is open to debate, however, the author's perception of such censorious excesses in Ireland was not. Frank O'Connor and the Irish Academy of Letters, of which he was a founding member, had continued to attack the Irish Free State, both at home and abroad, as the source of a hypocritical piety, in the Censorship of Publications Act (1929).

³⁸ Francis MacManus, 'Horizon', *The Irish Examiner* (17 February 1942), p. 2.

³⁹ Patrick Kavanagh, *Collected Poems* (London: MacGibbon and Kee, 1964).

⁴⁰ Alec Craig, *The Banned Books of England* (London: George Allen and Unwin, 1936), p. 95.

O'Connor's contribution continued in this vein, as it saw the Irish State under de Valera as morally bankrupt and religiously conservative; for him:

after the success of the Revolution that framework collapsed, and as happens, I suppose, after every successful revolution, Irish society began to revert to type. All the forces that had made for national dignity, that had united Catholic and Protestant, aristocrats like Constance Marcievicz, Labour revolutionists like Connolly and writers like AE, began to disintegrate rapidly and Ireland became more than ever sectarian, utilitarian (the two nearly always go together), vulgar and provincial.

Such hard hitting criticism from O'Connor would have been very difficult for the Irish State to accept. O'Connor had already met with considerable success for his radio broadcasts for the British Broadcasting Corporation in 1938, and he had been granted a travel permit for England by a suspicious Irish government at the beginning of 1941, so the appearance of this article must have caused some concern.⁴¹ Although supposedly an article about Irish literature, O'Connor took the opportunity of being outside of the remit of Irish censorship to attack the state and its politics. From an Irish establishment point of view, this was the equivalent of literary treason. An important Irish artist abroad in England writing scathing attacks on the government would always be of concern. It was a surprise that O'Connor's article did not cause a backlash for *The Bell* especially as his invective was so specifically aimed at de Valera personally:

Every year that has passed, particularly since de Valera's rise to power, has strengthened the grip of the gombeen man, of the religious secret societies like the Knights of Columbanus; of illiterate censorships. As I write, even a piece of sentimental Catholicism like Miss O'Brien's *Land of Spices*, which, in America, has been a colossal success among sectarian organizations, is legally outlawed in Ireland as being 'in its general tendency indecent' – it contains one brief reference to homosexuality. The Film Censor boasts that he has compelled the film renters to change the title of *I Want a Divorce* to *The Tragedy of Divorce*. One is not permitted to speak of Birth Control, and the sale of contraceptives is forbidden.⁴²

Censorship, contraceptives, divorce and homosexuality were socially divisive topics that were far from the priorities of the de Valera administration in 1941, who saw the role of censorship as specifically safeguarding a religiously observed commitment to neutrality.

⁴¹ For more on O'Connor's life during the war see James Matthews, *Voices: A Life of Frank O'Connor* (New York: Athenium, 1983), pp. 162-181.

⁴² Frank O'Connor, 'The Future of Irish Literature', *Horizon*, vol. 5, no. 25 (January 1942), pp. 56, 57.

Connolly's special 'Irish Number' was remarkable in its nakedly political outlook, and is perhaps the best example of the type of engaged magazine that O'Faoláin would have wished to publish in Ireland. However, it is important that both *The Bell* and *Horizon* were primarily magazines of literature and artistic expression. This edition of *Horizon* contained 'Letter from a Goose Shooter' by T.H. White, an account of his time spent living in isolation on the Innishkea islands off the coast of County Mayo. White, who would go on to write the Arthurian legend *The Once and Future King* (1958), had been invited to Ireland by O'Faoláin's friend and publisher Edward Garnett for the hunting season. He so loved the landscape and isolation that he stayed there for six years during the course of the war.⁴³ His account is remarkable for its total immersion in the natural environment: 'all the deep racial thoughts I had felt there, and the conviction of the relation of God to man [...] all my strength was momentarily crumbling away'.⁴⁴ The collection was also important for painting as a discipline also, because it opened up serious academic support for Jack B. Yeats as an artist. Sir Kenneth Clark contributed his account of the importance of Jack Yeats painting to an international audience, and he was instrumental in securing the painter's reputation by hosting an exhibition at the National Gallery in London.⁴⁵ Clark, who is perhaps now best remembered for his magisterial television series *Civilisation: A Personal View* (1969), was an acolyte of W.B. Yeats, and his meteoric rise into the English establishment saw him appointed as Director of the National Gallery at 31.⁴⁶ Clarke was a keen supporter of Jack Yeats's painting and saw in the artist's Irishness a unique factor in the successful development of his art: 'And where but in Ireland could he have discovered that aristocratic violence of style and subject besides which the taste and learning of his more prudent contemporaries seems bloodless, transitory, and dim.'⁴⁷

⁴³ For more on T.H. White see Sylvia Townsend Warner, *T. H. White* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1987).

⁴⁴ T. H. White, 'Letter from a Goose Shooter', *Horizon*, vol. 5, no. 25 (January 1942), p. 37.

⁴⁵ Again, John Betjeman was instrumental in working behind the scenes to collate Jack Yeats's work for this exhibit. See John Betjeman to Kenneth Clark (19 July 1941) in Candidia Lycett Green (ed), *John Betjeman: Letters, Volume One 1926-1951* (London: Minerva, 1994), p. 293.

⁴⁶ As an undergraduate, Clark attended a dinner in honour of the poet at his college in Oxford. See R.F. Foster, *W.B. Yeats: A Life, II the Arch Poet* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2003), p. 418.

⁴⁷ Kenneth Clark, 'Jack Yeats', *Horizon*, vol. 5, no. 25 (January 1942), p. 42.

Such cross-border exchanges between artistic peers in England, Ireland and further afield were commonplace, even in an environment as stifling as the Second World War. Just as the need for workers in a wartime economy opened up many opportunities for the working class Irish man and woman in the factories of Great Britain, so too did their well-heeled counterparts in the middle classes exploit the space available in cultural outlets such as the BBC, RTE and the literary magazines of the time. *The Bell*, as a transnational literary journal, played a part in promoting the stories of both. Thus, along with transnationally established authors, it contained accounts of the ordinary man and woman inspired by the English sociological movement Mass-Observation and its journal *Fact* (1937-1939). The exodus of many single girls to Great Britain to take up independent working positions caused a concomitant backlash in Ireland about their sexual activities abroad. As Clair Wills has noted:

The general climate of opinion on the dangers associated with the single girl were not so different from stereotypes of the newly independent shop girl which were common in turn-of-the-century Britain and France. In both cases women and girls were suspect merely by virtue of living alone and undertaking employment.⁴⁸

The Bell contained many accounts from similar girls writing in Britain from a position of forced or self-imposed exile. One such anonymous article, 'I wanted to be a Nurse' is an open and honest depiction of the conditions faced by such women, and contains suggested exposure to dangerous sexual encounters. Another written by 'Exile' berates Éire for its conservative attitudes to women and compares to role of women in public life in other countries with their impoverished position at home:

So, for all of us, man and women, it is a matter of a deliberate avowal, and a reorientation of the mind, and an effort to create the sort of framework in which a humane society *can* grow. For that reason we must have cultivated women in public office who will educate men into the requirements of a civilised society, deal with such matters as Education, Child Problems, the Family, Social Services, and so on.⁴⁹

The Bell even went as far as to source a specialist on Austrian social security in order to show how other countries ran their social services, and how Éire might choose to run its. 'Social Security in

⁴⁸ Clair Wills, *The Best are Leaving: Emigration and Post-War Irish Culture* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2015), p. 85.

⁴⁹ See A Probationer, 'I wanted to be an Nurse', *The Bell*, vol. 6, no. 3 (June 1943) and Exile, 'Women in Public Life', *The Bell*, vol. 5, no. 4 (January 1943), p. 270.

Austria', written by 'Sociologus' (described as a 'Pseudonym for an Austrian writer with long experience of social work in Vienna. Secretary of the former (pre-Dollfuss and pre-Hitler) Trade Union of Social Insurance Employees') it described the advances in public health for the working classes, with new social housing, public baths and advanced medical care.⁵⁰ In the same edition, alongside an account of the Belgian painter Marie Howet, was an article exposing the benefits of transnational cultural exchange to America's film industry, 'Hollywood has reaped the reward for having attracted many of the best actors, directors, writers, designers and technicians, not only in the United States, but from all over the world, and their number increases steadily. It has become an international centre for people whose talents are in international demand'.⁵¹

That *The Bell* could source such transnational expertise for its contributions is a testament to the level of cosmopolitanism that existed in Ireland. Ideas as diverse as social housing, window dressing, hat manufacture, the implementation of the Marshall Plan, censorship and Éire's surplus doctors sat in a comparative context alongside their global competition in this 'literary' periodical. Similarly, the Irish writers of *The Bell* found fame publishing in English, American and French magazines, and used their publication in Ireland as a platform for contacts and exposure in London, New York and Paris.⁵² The artists and writers of Northern Ireland were also given an opportunity to express their national identity across the border in Dublin and the contradictions of Irishness as a concept were exposed to open scrutiny in its pages. The literary periodical as a genre needs to be examined in terms of the new developments in transnational history and literature in Ireland. As the case of *The Bell* shows, accounts that focus exclusively upon the nation and its writers as the focus of

⁵⁰ Sociologus, 'Austrian Social Security', *The Bell*, vol. 3, no. 4 (July 1945).

⁵¹ Charles Sydney, 'Marie Howet: Belgian Painter of the Irish Scene', *The Bell*, vol. 3, no. 4 (July 1945) and Edward Hogg, 'Hollywood Grows Up' *The Bell*, vol. 3, no. 4 (July 1945), p. 327.

⁵² For example, Seán O'Faoláin, Peadar O'Donnell and Liam O'Flaherty were all contracted to the London-based publisher Jonathan Cape, sales in Ireland were only part of their income. For more on the Irish novel of the twentieth century see Derek Hand, *A History of the Irish Novel* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2011).

their study are unhelpfully reductive, and risk missing the importance of transnational developments and movements to Ireland and the Irish.